

# California State Library

## Early Learning with Families Initiative

*"Families may be big, small, extended, nuclear, multi-generational, with siblings or not, with one parent, two parents, grandparents or foster parents. Families live under one roof or many. We become part of a family by birth, adoption, marriage, or from a desire for mutual support. A family is a culture onto itself with different values and unique ways of realizing its dreams. Together, families become the source of our rich cultural heritage and spiritual diversity. Families create neighborhoods, communities, states and nations."*

(Adapted from the New Mexico Coalition for Youth and Families, 1990.)

### Philosophy

Public libraries are important community centers with the ability to reach families, caregivers, and childcare providers from all walks of life. Libraries serve their communities as resource centers and bridges – conveying important information, facilitating access to a wide array of resources and services, and helping families and the community get their needs met. Libraries also serve a vital role as community partners in the lifelong learning of their citizens. For these reasons, public libraries are uniquely positioned to provide supportive, family centered early learning environments and services that delight and inspire, helping our very youngest citizens, their families and subsequently our communities, reach their full potential.

*Early Learning with Families* is founded on the recognition that the family (parent or caregiver) is the constant in a child's life, while service systems and their personnel fluctuate. Furthermore, families are not only children's first but also their most powerful teachers. Research has shown that parent/family involvement in a child's development and education is more important to that child's eventual success than family income or education. For these reasons, library *Early Learning with Families* programs are most effective when built upon partnerships between families, caregivers and library professionals where information is shared and family expertise and diversity are valued; where programs and activities acknowledge that no single approach is right for all families; and where libraries serve as facilitators of families' self-discovery and mastery.

Children's development, especially during the first five years of life, is highly impacted by the kinds of environments and experiences to which they are exposed. Experiences and surroundings that delight in inquiry, encourage discovery and invite play naturally lead to children's development and learning.

Learning as a way of life begins with the joy of engagement, thrill of discovery, and satisfaction of achievement in response to stimulating experiences and challenges. The *Early Learning with Families* initiative is intended to help libraries become just such places for the families in their communities.

